

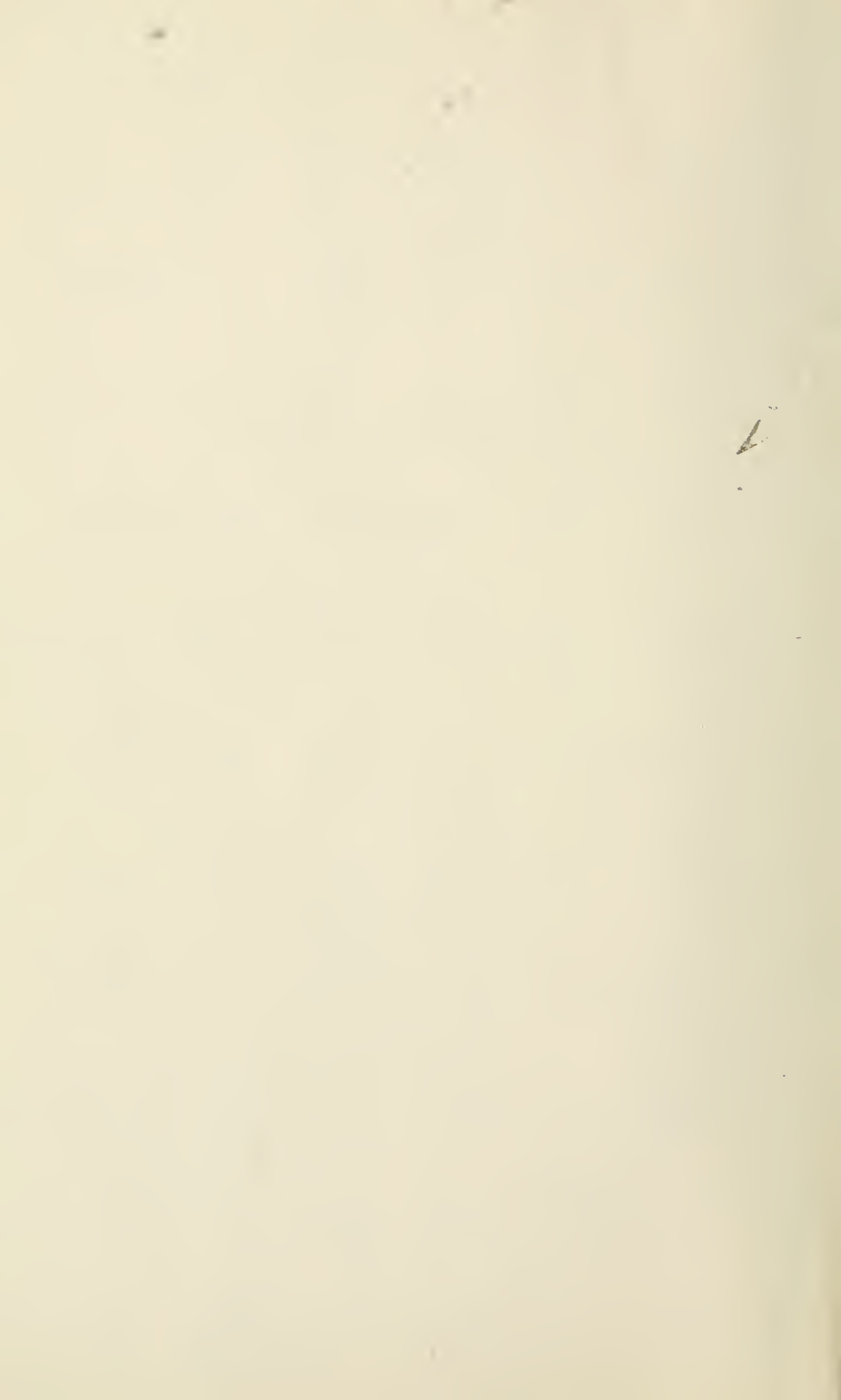
E 477

.63

.A47







**Capture of
Fort Fisher,
North Carolina,
Jan. 15, 1865.**

**General Adelbert Ames,
Late U. S. Army.**

THE CAPTURE OF FORT FISHER, NORTH CAROLINA,

January 15th, 1865.

About the first of December, 1864, when in command of the 2d Division, 24th Corps, of the Army of the James, then before Richmond, Va., I was notified I had been selected to lead my division in a movement, by sea, against some point of the Confederacy on the Atlantic coast.

At that time Wilmington, N. C., was the port through which the Confederacy received a large part of its munitions of war, and whence was shipped to England, in payment therefor, much of its cotton and tobacco. Wilmington was situated on the east bank of the Cape Fear River, thirty miles from its mouth, which was guarded by Fort Fisher.

Our Navy was untiring in its efforts to blockade that port; but was not successful.

The order from Gen. Butler to Gen. Weitzel relative to the expedition December 6th, 1864, was: "The Major General commanding has entrusted you with the command of the expedition about to embark for the North Carolina coast. It will consist of 6,500 infantry, two batteries and fifty cavalry. The effective men of Gen. Ames's division of the 24th Corps will furnish the infantry force. Gen. Paine is under your orders and Gen. Ames will be ordered to report to you in person immediately."

My division, of three brigades, was composed of New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, and Indiana troops, about 3,300 in number. Gen. Paine had a division of colored troops.

We embarked at Bermuda Hundreds, Va., December 8th, and our transports reached the place of rendezvous off New Inlet, N. C., Thursday, the 15th. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, we awaited the coming of the Navy.

Report on Conduct of the War. Ft. F. F. Ex., p. 122.

Admiral Porter, commanding our fleet, arrived Sunday evening, the 18th. The next day the water was too rough to make a landing on the ocean beach. Towards evening a north-east gale coming up, the transports were sent to Beaufort for coal and water, as the ten days' supply had run short, where they were delayed by the weather and the difficulty of getting coal, until Saturday, the 24th.

I did not go to Beaufort, as my ship, on which I had one of my brigades, was well prepared for such an emergency.

Gen. Butler, followed by his fleet of transports, returned to New Inlet on Saturday, the 24th of December, between four and five o'clock in the afternoon.

Report C. W. Ft. F. Ex., p. 123.

The powder boat, which played such a notorious part in this expedition, had been exploded at about two o'clock on the morning of the same day.

The idea of the powder boat was Gen. Butler's, but it was approved of and adopted by the Navy, which furnished the vessel and its share of the 215 tons of gunpowder used. The Navy held control of this experiment from first to last.

C. W. Ft. F. Ex., p. 250.

The explosion was untimely, and a failure. Commodore Jeffers of the Navy reports: "A part of the programme required that the vessel should be grounded, which appears not to have been the case."

C. W. Ft. F. Ex., p. 252.

Commander Rhind writes: "That, owing to the want of confinement and insufficient fusing of the mass, that much of the powder was blown away before ignition and its effect lost."

C. W. Ft. F. Ex., p. 250.

Admiral Porter reports: "That the powder was finally exploded from the effects of a fire kindled in the fore-castle. No results of value were to be expected from this mode. It was proposed only as a final resort, in order to prevent the vessel, in any contingency, from falling into the hands of the enemy."

Commander James Parker, U. S. Navy, stated to the New York Loyal Legion, Oct. 5, 1892: "We all believed in it (the powder boat) from the Admiral down, but when it proved so laughable a failure we, of the Navy, laid its paternity upon General Butler."

Col. Lamb, in command, describes Fort Fisher as follows: "At the land face of Fort Fisher the peninsula was about half a mile wide, Cape Fear River being on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other. This face commenced about a hundred feet from the river with a half bastion, and extended with a heavy curtain to a full bastion on the ocean side, where it joined the sea-face. The work was built to withstand the heaviest artillery fire. The outer slope was twenty feet high from the berm to the top of the parapet, at an angle of 45 degrees, and was sodded with marsh grass, which grew luxuriantly. The parapet was not less than 25 feet thick, with an inclination of only one foot. The revetment was five feet nine inches high, from the floor of the gun chambers, and these were some twelve feet or more from the interior plane. The guns were all mounted in barbette, Columbiad carriages; there was not a single casemated gun in the fort. Between the gun chambers, containing one or two guns each (there were twenty heavy guns on the land face), there were" (some 18) "heavy traverses, exceeding in size any known to engineers, to protect from an enfilading fire. They extended out some twelve feet on the parapet, running back thirty feet or more. The gun chambers were reached from the rear by steps. In each traverse was an alternate magazine or bomb-proof, the latter ventilated by an air-chamber. Passageways penetrated the traverses in the interior of the work, forming additional bomb-proofs for the reliefs of the guns.

"The sea-face was a mile long, and for a hundred yards from the northeast bastion was of the same massive character as the land face.

"As a defence against infantry there was a system of subterre torpedoes extending across the peninsula, five to six hundred feet from the land face and so disconnected that an

explosion of one would not affect the others; inside the torpedoes, about 50 feet from the berm of the work, extending from the river bank to the seashore, was a heavy palisade of sharpened logs nine feet high, pierced for musketry, and so laid out as to have an enfilading fire on the centre, where there was a redoubt guarding a sally-port from which two Napoleons were run out as occasion required. At the river end of the palisade was a deep and muddy slough, across which was a bridge, the entrance on the river road into the fort; commanding this bridge was a Napoleon gun. There were three mortars in rear of the land face."

Century War
Books, vol. 4,
p. 641.

This strong work had, at the time of our first expedition, a garrison of 1400 men, 900 of whom were veterans.

Century War
Books.

Col. Lamb had been incited to the utmost by Gen. Lee, who had sent him word that he "must hold the fort or he could not subsist his army."

Century War
Books.

On the morning of the 24th the fleet of Admiral Porter moved in towards New Inlet and opened fire on the fort. The character of this bombardment and the demands made by the Admiral on his ships and sailors I will let him tell.

In his letter to the Secretary of the Navy of the 24th of December, 1864, he says: "I have the honor to inform you that I attacked the forts at the mouth of the Cape Fear River today at 12.30. * * * * After getting the ships in position we silenced it in about an hour and a half, there being no troops here to take possession. I am merely firing now to keep up practice. The forts are nearly demolished, and as soon as troops come we can take possession. We have set them on fire, blown some of them up, and all that is wanted now is troops to land and go into them." The Admiral failed to mention, in his letter, the fact that I had offered 1,000 men and co-operation, although, in his testimony before the Committee on the Conduct of the War, he said: "Gen. Ames had a thousand men there, and he sent on board and told me he was ready to land."

C.W. Ft.F.Ex.,
p. 121.

C.W. Ft.F.Ex.,
p. 97.

In his letter of the 26th he says, referring to the bombardment of the 24th: "In an hour and fifteen minutes after the

first shot was fired not a shot came from the fort. Finding that the batteries were silenced completely I directed the ships to keep up a moderate fire in hopes of attracting the attention of the transports and bringing them in." In this same letter of December 26th Admiral Porter says, speaking of the bombardment of the forts on December 25th: "The firing this day was slow, only sufficient to amuse the enemy while the army landed. In the bombardment of the 25th the men were engaged firing slowly for seven hours. * * * Everything was coolly done throughout the day, and I witnessed some beautiful practice."

C.W. Ft.F.Ex.,
p. 123-4.

C.W. Ft.F.Ex.,
p. 125.

C.W. Ft.F.Ex.,
p. 125-6.

In a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, December 29th, after the fleet had left and the transports had gone back to Hampton Roads, he writes: "At no time did I permit the vessels to open on them with all their batteries, limiting some of them to about two shots a minute, and permitting the large vessels to fight only one division of guns at a time; and the bombardment cost only a certain amount of shells, which I would expend in a month's target practice anyhow." Such are the salient features of the reports of Admiral Porter.

C.W. Ft.F.Ex.,
p. 169-70.

Gen. Whiting, who was in the fort, and who commanded that military district, says the slight damage done by this cannonading was repaired at night, and that "the garrison was in no instance driven from its guns, the palisade was in perfect order, and the mines the same, the wires not having been cut."

C.W. Ft.F.Ex.,
p. 107, vol. 2.

Gen. Weitzel testified before the Committee on the Conduct of the War: "I made a reconnoissance of the fort and saw that the work, as a defensive work, was not injured at all, except that one gun about midway of the land face was dismounted. I did not see a single opening in the row of palisades that was in front of the ditch; it seemed to be perfectly intact." All in the fort agree that Admiral Porter was mistaken as to the effects of the cannonading.

C.W. Ft.F.Ex.,
p. 72.

So much as to the condition of the fort.

On the morning of the 25th all our transports anchored

near the shore some two or three miles north of the fort, and the troops immediately began to land.

I had been selected to storm the fort with my division.

My report on December 28th is as follows: "Brevet Brig. Gen. Curtis and 500 of his brigade were the first to land, and were taken towards the fort by Gen. Weitzel for a reconnoissance. * * * * It was dusk when I reached the front. I then heard that the First Brigade was to remain where it was until further orders, and that if any attack was made the responsibility would rest with the officer in immediate command. At this time I did not know that it had been decided not to attack the fort. Upon the report of Curtis that he could take the fort I sent his brigade forward to make the attempt." In his report Curtis says: "On my arrival at this point I received orders from Gen. Ames to return and re-establish my lines as they were, and, if possible, to occupy the fort, and I at once ordered my skirmishers forward, etc. * * * * The enemy, having cover of the darkness, opened on the skirmishers as they advanced with musketry and canister, but did not prevent their establishing the line in its former position, with the reserves in close proximity." Curtis made no further effort to take the fort, as I had ordered him to do, but sent word to me that he was "occupying his former position." Why he failed to assault the fort after I assumed the responsibility and gave the order I have never known. At this time an order reached me to return to our ships, which we did, and the first expedition ended.

An incident occurred which had much to do in giving an erroneous idea of the condition of the fort and garrison.

One of our lieutenants approached the fort and captured its flag, which had been shot away by the Navy, and which had fallen with the flag staff on the outer slope of the parapet to the ditch.

On this point Gen. Weitzel testifies: "I sent for Lieut. Walling and questioned him about it, and he told me that a shell

had knocked the flagstaff outside and on top of the parapet, and the flag hung over into or outside of the ditch. Thinking that probably the rebels had not observed it, he crept up on his hands and knees to the palisading, found a hole in it that one of the shells had made, crept through the hole and up to the flag, and got it and got away with it without being observed."

C.W. Ft.F. Ex.
p. 77.

Let us see why our expedition terminated thus abruptly.

Weitzel had been ordered by Butler to land and make a reconnoissance. In his testimony before the Committee on the Conduct of the War he gave his experience during the war in charging and defending field works, and continuing, said: "After that experience, with the information I had obtained from reading and study—for before this war I was an instructor at the Military Academy for three years under Professor Mahan, on those very subjects—remembering well the remarks of the Lieutenant General commanding, that it was his intention I should command that expedition, because another officer selected by the war department had once shown timidity, and in face of the fact that I had been appointed a Major General only twenty days before, and needed confirmation; notwithstanding all this, I went back to Gen. Butler, and told him I considered it would be murder to order an attack on that work with that force."

C.W. Ft.F. Ex.,
p. 72-3.

Col. Lamb says, in reference to the loss of his flag: "I had no fear of an assault, and because, during a bombardment which rendered an assault impossible, I covered my men, and a few straggling skirmishers, too few to attract attention, got near the fort, and some gallant officers thought they could have carried the work, it does not follow that they would not have paid dearly for their temerity if they had made the attempt."

Letter of Col.
Lamb, dated
Norfolk, Va.,
Jan. 20, 1890.

Gen. Whiting speaks to the same effect.

W.R. vol. XLII.
part 1, p. 993.

Now, who is to say that Weitzel, Whiting and Lamb were mistaken as to the situation that day? Is it the brave soldier, who crept unseen through a hole in the palisade to the parapet and took a flag from a staff which had been shot away?

Is it Admiral Porter, who wrote to the Secretary of the Navy January 17th, 1865: "I have since visited Fort Fisher and the adjoining works, and find their strength greatly beyond what I had conceived. An engineer might be excusable in saying they could not be captured except by regular siege. I wonder, even now, how it was done. The work, as I said before, is really stronger than the Malakoff tower, which defied so long the combined power of France and England." In a letter of the 16th of January to the Secretary of the Navy, he says: "I was in Fort Malakoff a few days after it surrendered to the French and English; the combined armies of the two nations were many months capturing that stronghold, and it won't compare, either in size or strength, to Fort Fisher."

C. W. Ft. F. Ex.,
p. 190.

C. W. Ft. F. Ex.,
p. 184.

I have no hesitancy in saying that they were not mistaken, though it is true that without personal knowledge of the character of the fort, and, for the time, believing Curtis, I ordered him to take it on his assertion that he could do so.

What was not possible December 25th, was made possible January 15th, through an efficient bombardment on the part of the Navy and the co-operation of 2,000 sailors and marines and an additional force of 1,400 infantry.

January 1st, 1865, Grant wrote to Secretary Stanton: "The fact is, there are but two ways of taking Fort Fisher, operating from the water; one is to surprise them whilst there is but a small garrison defending the place; the other is for the Navy to send a portion of their fleet into Cape Fear River." * * * * He continues: "In the three days of good weather which elapsed after the Army had reached the scene of action, before the Navy appeared, our troops had the chance of capturing Fort Fisher whilst it had an insufficient garrison to hold it. The delay gave the enemy time to accumulate a force. * * * * The failure before was the result of delays by the Navy."

W. R., vol. 1.
XLVI, part 2.
p. 4.

So, of Grant's two ways of taking the fort, one by surprise failed, as he said, because of the delay of the Navy, and as to the other, Col. Comstock reports to Grant, January 9th: "There is

no hope, at least at present, of the Admiral's trying to run by Fort Fisher."

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 2,
p. 80.

Grant ordered and intended that Weitzel should have command of the expedition. North Carolina was in Butler's military department. His order retained Weitzel as his subordinate.

Though Grant may have intended and ordered certain action on the part of our expedition in December, 1864, on the first of January, 1865, he wrote the Secretary of War, as just quoted, that there were but two ways to take the fort—by surprise or by the occupancy of the river by the Navy. There was no surprise, the Navy was not in the river, the bombardment of the fort was ineffectual, Weitzel decided against an assault, Butler acquiesced and ordered the expedition back to Virginia, saying to Weitzel at the same time that he, Butler, would assume all responsibility, as he could stand the blame better than could Weitzel, the professional soldier.

The Committee on the Conduct of the War was composed of the leading men in Congress at that time. Much experience in the investigation of military affairs had made them, to say the least, fairly capable judges. They could command any witness, they were critical and severe in their examinations, and their conclusions were reached without fear or favor. Honest Ben Wade was their Chairman. This is their decision:

"In conclusion, your Committee would say, from all the testimony before them, that the determination of Gen. Butler not to assault the fort seems to have been fully justified by all facts and circumstances then known or afterwards ascertained."

C. W. Ft. F. Ex.
vol. II. p. 80.

Few can comprehend the penalty Gen. Butler had to pay for his action on this occasion. The war was within a few months of its end, and he had hoped for a share of the honors conferred on those who served faithfully and well, but he was sent home, and the whole nation condemned him for the failure. Gen. Weitzel, one of the best of men, and one of our ablest generals, was humbled in spirit before the storm of censure and ridicule. But all that came after the capture of the fort on our second expedition.

PART II.

The second expedition was started without delay. January 2nd, 1865, Gen. A. H. Terry was put in command. On the 3rd we left camp, began re-embarkation on the 4th, and completed it on the 5th.

I had 3,300 picked men in my division. Gen. Paine had the same number in his. There were added a brigade of 1,400 men under Col. J. G. Abbott and two batteries of light artillery of three and six guns each. Col. Comstock, who represented Grant on our first expedition, returned with us on the second.

The transports put to sea on the morning of the 6th. A severe storm drove them into Beaufort.

The troops were landed on the 13th, some two miles north of the fort.

Upon landing the first work on hand was to establish a line of breastworks from the ocean beach to the river to keep the enemy in the direction of Wilmington from interfering with our operations.

A reconnoissance was made. Terry reports: "As a result of this reconnoissance, and in view of the extreme difficulty which might be expected in landing supplies and the materials for a siege on the often tempestuous beach, it was decided to attempt an assault the next day, provided that, in the mean time, the fire of the Navy should so far destroy the palisades as to make one practicable. This decision was communicated to Admiral Porter, who at once placed a division of his vessels in a position to accomplish this last-named object. It was arranged, in consultation with him, that a heavy bombardment from all the vessels should commence early in the morning and continue up to the moment of the assault, and that even then it should not cease, but should be diverted from the points of attack to the other parts of the work. It was decided that the assault should be made at 3 P. M., that the army should attack on the western half of the land face, and that a column of sailors and marines should assault the northeast bastion. The fire of the Navy continued

during the night. At 8 A. M. of the 13th all of the vessels, except a division left to aid in the defense of our northern line, moved into position, and a fire, magnificent alike for its power and accuracy, was opened," and continued all day Saturday, Saturday night and Sunday, till 3.30 P. M. "Ames's division had been selected for the assault. * * * At 3.25 P. M. all the preparations were completed, the order to move forward was given to Ames, and a concerted signal was made to Admiral Porter to change the direction of his fire."

The situation at this time was as follows: Some two miles north of the fort Gen. Paine had established a line of breastworks, from ocean to river, facing north, with his own division on the left and Col. Abbott's brigade on the right. On the sea beach, about half a mile from the fort, were 2,000 sailors and marines under command of Fleet Capt. K. R. Breese. On the east were 64 ships of war, under Admiral Porter, cannonading the fort. My three brigades were in line, one behind the other, ranging from three to five hundred yards from the fort. The left of each line nearly opposite the middle of the land face of the fort, the right near the river. A body of sharpshooters were pushed forward, and the whole division was covered from the fire of the enemy, as far as possible, by the inequalities of the ground and slight pits formed by throwing up the sand.

Terry, Comstock and I were in a small advanced outwork about half a mile from the fort. My able and gallant Adjutant General, General Chas. A. Carleton, has made the following record: "Gen. Terry turned to Gen. Ames and said: 'Gen. Ames, the signal agreed upon for the assault has been given.' Gen. Ames asked: 'Have you any special orders to give?' Gen. Terry replied: 'No, you understand the situation and what is desired to be accomplished. I leave everything to your discretion.'" Thus was given me the unrestricted command of the fighting forces.

At once I directed Capt. Lawrence of my staff to order Curtis, commanding the First Brigade, to charge, striking the parapet at the end nearest the river. The palisade had been

sufficiently broken and shot away by the fire of the Navy to permit the passage of the troops. As I approached the fort I watched with anxious eyes the charge of the First Brigade.

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 1,
p. 417.

Capt. Lawrence heroically led the charge of that part of the brigade which advanced at this time. He was the first through the palisade, and while reaching for a guidon to plant on the first traverse, his hand was shot away and he was dangerously wounded in the neck, but with this lodgment on the first traverse, the force of the charge was spent. I quickly ordered Col. Penny-packer's brigade, which was close at hand, to charge and sweep down the parapet to the ocean.

I will not attempt a description of the battle. It was a charge of my brigades, one after the other, followed by desperate fighting at close quarters over the parapet and traverses and in and through the covered ways. All the time we were exposed to the musketry and artillery of the enemy, while our own Navy was thundering away, occasionally making us the victims of its fire.

The official reports of my officers give no adequate idea of their gallant deeds, but they must supply the form and coloring of the warlike scenes of that eventful Sunday.

Col. Daggett, in command of the First Brigade, January 17th, reports: "At about 3 P. M., General Curtis having received orders to that effect from Gen. Ames, through Capt. Lawrence, the brigade advanced to the charge, so as to strike the sally-port, that having been deemed the only vulnerable point of the work; and, after a desperate struggle, the advance of the brigade reached the parapet of the fort and scaled it to the first traverse, where the guidon of the 117th New York was planted—the first colors on the fort."

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 1,
p. 418-9.

Major O. P. Harding, who came out of the fight in command of the Second Brigade, reports: "The brigade was ordered to assault the fort, which was done in a gallant manner and under a heavy fire of grape and musketry, and entered the fort through a sally-port near the river. The 203rd Pennsylvania, commanded

by Col. J. W. Moore, was the first to enter the fort, closely followed by the 97th Pennsylvania, commanded by First Lieutenant John Wainwright. The colors of each of those regiments reached the parapet about the same time, those of the 97th borne by Col. Pennypacker, and of the 203rd by Col. Moore. Col. Pennypacker was seriously wounded while planting his colors on the third traverse, and Col. Moore fell dead while passing the second traverse, waving his colors and commanding his men to follow. After entering the fort the brigade became somewhat broken up; nevertheless, both officers and men behaved gallantly until its capture."

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 1,
p. 419-20.

"After the fall of Lieut. Col. Lyman, 203rd Pennsylvania, who fell on the sixth traverse, I commanded the regiment until about 5 P. M., when ordered by Gen. Ames to take command of the brigade, which I immediately organized."

Capt. H. B. Essington, commanding 203rd Pennsylvania, reports: "The regiment charged on the right of the Second Brigade, and was the first regiment of the brigade to enter the fort, going in with the First (Curtis's) Brigade. After having assisted in capturing the first two mounds, a portion of the regiment went to the right and stationed themselves behind a bank in the open field south of the fort. The latter portion then charged across the plain, by order of the commanding general (Gen. Ames), until opposite the seventh or eighth traverse, where they threw up an embankment with their tin plates and shovels, which they held until the fort surrendered, keeping up a steady fire on the enemy."

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 1,
p. 420.

Let me say, in passing, that Col. Pennypacker's conduct in leading his brigade with the colors of his own regiment, placed him second to none for gallantry that day. It would be difficult to overestimate the value of his example to his brigade.

Entering the fort and passing to the rear of the parapet at the west end, I made an examination of it from that position, and decided to use my third brigade, Col. Bell's, with its left by the parapet, right extended south and west inside the fort, and charge into the angle formed by the land and sea faces. I ordered Bell forward with his brigade to report to me. Lieut.

Col. Johnson, commanding the Third Brigade, January 19th, reports: "Col. Bell was ordered by Gen. Ames to remain near him for the purpose of receiving orders." Unfortunately Col. Bell was killed in the advance, gallantly leading his brigade. The part of his brigade which reached me was in a somewhat disorganized condition. I formed it as best I could for the charge. Owing to the obstructions of the demolished quarters of the garrison and the fire of the enemy from the front (the angle had been partially filled in and was protected by a curtain), and from the right, as well as the fire of our Navy, the advance was checked. The men were in a very exposed position, and as no advantage could be gained there I ordered them to join the other troops in pushing seaward on the land face of the fort. Lieut. Col. Johnson further reports: "The brigade entered the fort conjointly with a portion of the First (Curtis's) Brigade, at the left bastion, a portion moving along the terre-plain and a portion on the ramparts, parapets and slopes, some of the officers and men in the advance with officers and men of other brigades, all vying with each other."

Owing to the contracted space in which the fighting was done, brigade and regimental formations were impossible. What was accomplished was through the heroic efforts of small bodies of officers and men.

From time to time I sent to Terry, who was in the earthwork half a mile away, reports of the progress I was making.

I had previously learned that the sailors and marines who had made an attack on the sea angle had been quickly repulsed.

As the sun sank to the horizon, the ardor of the assault abated. Our advance was but slow. Ten of my officers had been killed, 47 wounded, and about 500 men were killed and wounded. Among the killed was one brigade commander, the other two were wounded and disabled. I now requested Terry to join me in the fort. It was dark before he and Comstock arrived. I explained the situation.

Col. Abbott's brigade, which had been relieved from its

position in the line facing Wilmington, by the defeated sailors and marines, had been ordered to report to me.

I decided to make my chief effort with the re-enforcements by moving the troops by the flank between the palisade and the foot of the fort until the head of the column should reach the northeast angle by the ocean, then face to the right and rush the men up and over the parapet; and at the same time continue the struggle for the traverses. Col. J. C. Abbott, commanding Second Brigade, 1st division, in his report of January 15th, says: "Reaching the fort about dark I reported to Gen. Ames. By order of Gen. Ames I first threw the 3rd New Hampshire Volunteers, Capt. Trickey commanding, along the portion of the north face of the work already occupied by his troops and relieved them; also by Gen. Ames's order, I threw out the 7th Connecticut Volunteers, Capt. Marble commanding, as a picket in rear of the work, the right of the line resting on Cape Fear River. During this time the enemy occupied all the eastern and about one-third the northern face of the work. At about 9 o'clock, by order of Gen. Ames, I then proceeded to dislodge the enemy from the remainder of the fort. I then advanced the 7th New Hampshire, Lieut. Col. Rollins commanding. They at once and gallantly charged up the slope enveloping the sea angle of the work, meeting a sharp fire from the enemy, who were stationed behind the parapets, and in rear of the main work."

Capt. William H. Trickey, commanding 3rd New Hampshire Regiment, reports January 18th: "I was directed by Col. Abbott, commanding Brigade, to move my regiment to the extreme advance held by the second division and open fire upon the enemy; was thus engaged for nearly an hour, having, to a great extent, silenced the enemy's fire; was then directed by Col. Abbott to take and hold, with 20 men, the next traverse in front, the remainder of my command being left in several traverses to keep up the fire upon the enemy. We took the traverse, as directed, driving the enemy out. Thinking we could go farther, we charged and took the next two, with a like result. After taking the third traverse, having met with considerable resistance, I did not deem it prudent to go farther with so few men, and

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 1,
p. 410.

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 1,
p. 413.

opened a vigorous fire upon the enemy, who was rallying for the recapture of the traverses; we held the enemy in check until the arrival of the 7th New Hampshire and 6th Connecticut, who charged and took the remainder of the work."

Lieut. Col. Rollins reports: "At 10 P. M. moved my regiment inside the fort, and was ordered by Gen. Ames to take two traverses, and three, if possible, the number not then taken. I moved over the third traverse of the fort, and advanced rapidly inside the stockade until I reached the battery on the northeast angle of the fort, where I formed the right wing of the regiment, leaving the left in support. I then ordered a charge and captured the three remaining traverses and batteries, then pushed on by the right flank, and by so doing cut off the angle of the fort, moved to the right, and, by a rapid and determined advance, captured the remaining traverses and batteries of the fort proper."

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 1,
p. 414.

C. W. Ft. F. Ex.
p. 190.

Thus, after some seven hours' fighting, more than five of which were after dark, the land face of the fort was occupied and all resistance ceased. The enemy fled to the shelter of Battery Buchanan, at the end of the point, two miles away. Terry took Abbott and a part of his brigade and marched to Battery Buchanan. Abbott reports: "I was met by the Adjutant General of the General commanding the enemy's forces, who tendered the surrender of the battery, upon which I referred to Gen. Terry, who would soon arrive. * * * Gen. Terry having arrived, received the surrender of the work and the force."

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 1,
p. 410.

Col. Abbott was mistaken. Terry was too late. Capt. Lockwood of my staff had already received the surrender.

It was after ten o'clock. The task set for us at half-past three was finished. Our work was done.

The statement of their achievement is the highest eulogy that can be passed upon our soldiers.

A grievous accident occurred early the next morning, which killed and wounded one hundred and thirty of our gallant heroes. It was the explosion of the magazine of the fort. A board of enquiry was organized and found, "that the following are the

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 1,
p. 430.

main facts, viz.: 1, immediately after the capture of the fort, Gen. Ames gave orders to Lieut. Col. Samuel M. Zent to place guards on all the magazines and bomb-proofs. 2, Lieut. Col. Zent commenced on the northwest corner of the fort, next the river, following the traverses round, and placed guards on thirty-one entrances under the traverses. The main magazine, which afterwards exploded, being in the rear of the traverses, escaped his notice, and, consequently, had no guards from his regiment or any other."

Gen. Bragg reports that the defenders of the fort numbered, all told, about 110 commissioned officers and 2,500 men—their casualties being over 400. A few escaped across the river, in boats, under cover of the darkness; the rest became our prisoners.

Mr. Stanton, the Secretary of War, had been visiting Sherman at Savannah after his march through Georgia, and on his way north called at Fort Fisher, where he had an interview with Terry.

Upon Stanton's arrival at Fortress Monroe, Va., he sent a dispatch to President Lincoln marked "official," dated Tuesday, 10 A. M., Jan. 17, 1865. In this dispatch Stanton mentions Terry, my brigade commanders and some regimental commanders, but omits my name altogether. Among other things he says: "The assault on the other and most difficult side of the fort was made by a column of 3000 troops of the old 10th corps, led by Col. Curtis, under the immediate supervision of Gen. Terry."

This is not true, as the official reports show, in any other sense than that Curtis's brigade first reached the fort under my immediate orders with Terry half a mile away. An earlier attempt to make public these facts has been impracticable, as the volume of the war records covering this event was not published till 1894.

With this as a preface I will add to the extracts of the reports of some of my subordinate officers already given, the report of Gen. Terry, who was my only superior officer. He says: "Of Gen. Ames I have already spoken in a letter recommending his promotion. He commanded all the troops engaged and was constantly under fire. His great coolness,

Century War
Books, vol.
IV, p. 661.

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 1,
p. 399.

good judgment and skill were never more conspicuous than in this assault."

W. R., vol.
XLVI, part 1,
p. 417.

These official reports show, as Terry says, that I "commanded all the troops engaged" from the first act, when my aide, Capt. A. G. Lawrence, led the first brigade into the fort, to the last act, when the garrison surrendered to my aide, Capt. H. C. Lockwood.

C.W. Ft.F.Ex.,
p. 103.

The sailors and marines who assaulted in column the north-east angle of the fort along the sea beach, were a body of 2,000 men, made up of detachments from different ships. Naturally enough, Capt. Breese found it, as has been stated, an unwieldy mass. The 1,600 sailors were armed only with pistols and cutlasses. They were quickly repulsed. Few reached the parapet. Once checked, they turned and fled, losing 300 in killed and wounded. Admiral Porter testified: "I suppose the whole thing was over in fifteen minutes, as far as the sailors were concerned, for they were cut down like sheep."

Later, this force was sent to the line of entrenchments facing Wilmington, relieving Col. Abbott's brigade, which reported to me. Of course Admiral Porter expected his sailors to carry the fort, but, alas! he had been deceived as to its defensive capabilities, which deception resulted in the apparently needless sacrifice of his gallant sailors.

Our Navy, in its ships and armament, was the most powerful that ever existed up to that time. In officers and men it never had its equal, and never will till an equally enlightened, powerful and liberty-loving people again rise, in their might, in a struggle for self-preservation.

Century War
Books, p. 654.

As to the effect on the fort of the second bombardment, Col. Lamb writes: "The land armament, with palisades and torpedoes, had been destroyed. For the first time in the history of sieges the land defences of the works were destroyed, not by the act of the besieging army, but by the concentrated fire, direct and enfilading, of an immense fleet, poured upon them without intermission, until torpedo wires were cut, palisades breached so that

they actually afforded cover for assailants, and the slopes of the work were rendered practicable for assault."

Why the first expedition was a failure and the second a success has never been rightly understood. The military situations have been obscured by the contention between Gen. Butler and Admiral Porter, though the most amicable relations existed between the army and navy.

It has been believed that the fort was in the same condition on both occasions, and that it was but poorly garrisoned on the first. Those who so held were in error in both particulars.

According to Badeau, Grant's historian: "Curtis declared that the fort could have been carried on the first expedition, and that at the moment when they were recalled they virtually had possession." This declaration has been accepted as the truth.

Badeau's History of U. S. Grant, vol. III, p. 316.

We can examine the facts, now that the official reports have been published, and form our own opinions on this point, which has been the pivot of the whole controversy.

It appears from Curtis's report that he had "pushed the right of his skirmishers to within 75 paces of the fort and had sent back to his reserves for 200 men with which to possess the fort, but his messenger was there informed that orders from the department commander bade him retire," which he did.

W. R., vol. XLII, part 1, p. 983.

Let us see what these 200 men would have had to do to make what Curtis calls a "virtual," an actual possession of the fort.

Col. Lamb had a force of 1,400 men, 900 of whom were veterans. Whiting, Lamb and other officers commend the discipline, skill and gallantry of the garrison. I will not take time to quote from their reports. They all show that the officers of the fort were keenly alive to our movements. Col. Lamb states that he intentionally kept his men hidden from view. He was perfectly familiar with the surroundings, both within and without the fort.

Now, the one question to decide is, could those 200 men, sent for by Curtis, have taken possession of that palisaded Malakoff fortress, with its garrison of 1,400 men?

Lieut. Col. Barney, who commanded our forces behind the picket line, nowhere intimates that we had any kind of possession of the fort.

Even Curtis reports, officially, that his skirmishers were met with musketry and canister, and that he retired under a heavy fire.

Century War
Books.

In making a decision, Lamb's report must not be overlooked. He reports: "That it was dark at 5.30, when the fleet ceased firing. No assault could be made while the fleet was firing. When the firing ceased the parapets (which were 20 feet high) were at once manned and half of the garrison (700 men) were stationed outside the work behind the palisade, which was 9 feet high and pierced for musketry." What soldier will say we had "virtual" possession of the fort under such circumstances?

The second expedition took this question from the realm of speculation.

Three weeks after the first attempt we were back again before the fort, which, because of the efficient bombardment of the Navy, was far less capable of resistance. A column of 2,000 sailors and marines were to make a gallant assault on the sea angle simultaneously with ours, thereby to create a diversion, greatly to our advantage.

Curtis had in his brigade, now forming the first line, more than twice as many men as he had before the fort on the first expedition. Again I gave him the order to take the fort. Did he take it? No. His brigade, led by Capt. Lawrence, made a lodgment on one corner of it—a lodgment so uncertain that I immediately ordered up Col. Pennypacker's brigade, which, inspired and led by him and Col. Moore, reached the third traverse and made our foothold secure. Such are the official records of the battle.

I wish to touch one other point. Badeau writes in this same history: "The fighting was continued from traverse to traverse, until at 9 o'clock the troops had nearly reached the bastion. Bell had been killed and Pennypacker wounded, and Curtis now sent back for re-enforcements. The advance party was in imminent peril, for the guns from both bastions and the mound batteries

Badeau's His-
tory of U. S.
Grant, Vol.
III, p. 342.

were turned upon them. At this crisis a staff officer brought orders from Terry to stop fighting and begin intrenching. Curtis was inflamed with the magnificent rage of battle, and fairly roared at this command, 'Then we shall lose whatever we have gained. The enemy will drive us from here in the morning.' While he spoke he was struck by a shell, and fell senseless to the earth. The hero of Fort Fisher had fallen, and the fort was not yet carried. Ames, who was near him, sent an officer to Terry to report that Curtis was killed, and that his dying request was that the fighting might go on. It was also Ames's opinion that the battle should proceed. Terry caught the contagion, and determined to continue the assault, even if it became necessary to abandon the line of defence towards Wilmington. Abbott's re-enforcements were at once ordered forward, and as they entered the fort the rebels on the bastion gave way and Fort Fisher was carried." It is due to Badeau to state that he says in a note that he "obtained the account of this assault from a paper written by an aide-de-camp to Gen. Curtis."

This remarkable statement deserves a moment's consideration. If it be true, then all the chief honors must fall on one head. But it is not true. If Terry gave orders to stop fighting and begin intrenching, who can believe that it was through the "contagion caught" by him from Curtis that the fight continued, or that he would "abandon the line towards Wilmington" to try uncertainties at the fort?

Terry reports: "When Bell's brigade was ordered into action I foresaw that more troops would probably be needed, and sent an order for Abbott's brigade to move down from the north line, at the same time requesting Captain Breese to replace them with his sailors and marines. I also directed General Paine to send me one of the strongest regiments of his own division; these troops arrived at dusk and reported to General Ames."

This treatment of Terry and the ignoring of division, brigade and regimental commanders find no justification in the facts. Terry is entitled to every honor due his position. Pennypacker and Bell can not be swept aside so lightly, nor the regimental commanders, whose names I need not give here.

W. R. vol. XLVI
p. 399.

I would say specifically to that reference to myself, that I did not send any request, "dying" or other, from Curtis to Terry that the fighting might go on.

If Terry intended my division to stop fighting and begin intrenching he did not send the order to Curtis, one of my brigade commanders, nor would Terry send re-enforcements to Curtis over my head.

According to this aide, Curtis was wounded at 9 o'clock while criticizing Terry's order to stop fighting and begin intrenching. I say in my report that Curtis was wounded "a short time before dark" on that brief winter's day.

I saw him in and emerge from a covered way at the west end of the parapet. He approached me and began to speak; almost at the same time a shot struck him down. Col. Daggett, who succeeded to the command of Curtis's brigade, reports two days after: Curtis was seriously wounded about 4.30. Gen. Carleton, who was with me at the time, and picked up his sword as he fell, says Curtis was shot at about 4.30.

And yet Badeau would have us believe that Curtis was wounded while criticizing Terry's order to stop fighting and begin intrenching, at 9 o'clock, some four hours after Curtis fell senseless at my feet.

In fact, he was wounded before dark, about an hour and a half after the battle began, and some four hours before the fort was taken. The exact minute is of no importance. Participants in a battle are poor judges of passing time.

In this instance it is fixed accurately enough in the official reports of Daggett, Abbott and myself, as well as Carleton's statement of his recollections.

Gen. Terry says in his official report of the battle: "Brigadier General Curtis and Colonels Pennypacker, Bell and Abbott, the brigade commanders, led them with the utmost gallantry. Curtis was wounded after fighting in the front rank, rifle in hand; Pennypacker while carrying the standard of one of his regiments, the first man in a charge over a traverse; Bell was mortally wounded near the palisade."

This is all, literally all, Terry says of exceptional services by Curtis. "Fighting in the front rank, rifle in hand" is most commendable under the circumstances, but it does not in itself justify claims for exceptional honors.

My report says: "The conduct of the officers and men of this division was most gallant. * * * Where the name of every officer and man engaged in this desperate conflict should be submitted, I shall at present only be able to give a few of those most conspicuous. It is hoped all may be properly rewarded.

W. R., vol.
XLVI. part 1,
p. 416.

"Brevet Brig. Gen. N. M. Curtis, commanding First Brigade, was prominent throughout the day for his bravery, coolness and judgment. His services can not be overestimated. He fell a short time before dark, seriously wounded in the head by a canister shot.

"Col. Pennypacker, commanding the Second Brigade, was seriously wounded while planting his colors on the third traverse of the work. This officer was surpassed by none, and his absence during the day was most deeply felt and seriously regretted.

"Col. L. Bell, commanding Third Brigade, was mortally wounded while crossing the bridge in advance of the palisading. He was an able and efficient officer; one not easily replaced.

"Col. J. W. Moore, 203d Pennsylvania Volunteers, behaved with the most distinguished gallantry. He was killed while passing the second traverse of the fort, in advance of his regiment, waving his colors. Few equalled, none surpassed this brave officer."

My report on Curtis is not less generous than Terry's; but it was not intended to, and I doubt if it does, sustain his pretensions of this day.

The official records, written thirty-two years ago, must be the foundation for all claims of honor and distinction. Nothing can now be added to them or taken from them. By them we all must be judged.

Misrepresentations greatly injured General Butler, and deeply

humiliated Gen. Weitzel. Truth has been outraged—truth over-
slow in the pursuit of falsehood, not always the most agreeable
company.

In this paper I have attempted to right a wrong. I have
given few opinions of my own. I have called up the actors them-
selves, and have let them speak in their own words—sometimes
under oath—always under a sense of grave responsibility.

AUTHORITIES.

Report of the Committee on the Conduct of the War, Vol. II, Fort Fisher Expe-
dition. War of the Rebellion Records, Vol. XLII, part 1. War Records, Vol.
XLVI, part 1. War Records, Vol. XLVI, part 2. The Century Company's War
Books, Vol. IV. Letter of Col. Wm. Lamb, dated Norfolk, Va.



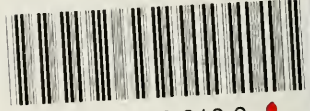


JUNE 69



N MANCHESTER,
INDIANA

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 013 708 916 6